



The Violent Are Taking the Kingdom of Heaven by Storm

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The Montserrat Intermonastic Encounter

Editor's Note: Since we began the "News and Notes" section of our journal, there have been yearly reports on the monastic encounters between Buddhism and Christianity. While these reports have outlined the events that have taken place in this important encounter, one may wonder about the impressions of the participants: What is the experience of a Zen monk living in a Christian monastery? What do the Christian hosts think about these Zen monastics? To answer these types of questions, we have collected three reports by participants in an intermonastic exchange that took place in 1987 at the Monastery of Montserrat in Spain. First is a report from Brother Bartomeu Ubach, one of the persons responsible for hosting the two Zen Buddhist guests. This is followed by reports by the two Zen Buddhists involved in the exchange, Genshō Hōzumi Roshi and his disciple Genkai Sugimoto. We wish to thank Professor Tokiyuki Nobuhara (Claremont Center for Process Studies) for his careful translation of the Japanese reports.

The Violent Are Taking the Kingdom of Heaven by Storm

BARTOMEU UBACH

The Monastery of Montserrat

One of the dramatic changes that took place in the Roman Catholic Church with the Vatican II Council was a new approach to the followers of other religions. However, this approach in a sense was not really "new." As in many other instances, what Vatican II intended to do was to revive the deeper tradition of the Church. We must read *Nostra Aetate* in the light of *Lumen Gentium*. The deeper and fuller vision that the Church has of herself also implies a deeper vision of other religions, which are not without a relationship to Christ and so to the Church. For the Church, these are not theoretical issues, but pertain to concrete experience. The teaching of the Council formulated what the Church was already living. And out of this life the Church understands what She has to do to live ever better.

Montserrat (Catalonia, Spain) is a Benedictine monastery with almost one thousand years of history. Presently, it houses a community of some ninety monks. The monastery was founded around 1025 next to a chapel dedicated to

Our Lady, "Sancta Maria," and first documented in 888. The shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat attracts in our days more than one and a half million visitors every year. Many are simple tourists, who may not even discover the presence of a monastic community. But many more are pilgrims, from all parts of the world. There is a deep relationship between these pilgrims and the monks. The life of the monks has to overflow, we could say, upon the pilgrims. The monks are faced also with the secularized society around them, with western atheism. On the other hand, the world of other religions remains rather far away from their daily experience. Thus the invitation to have two Zen Buddhist monks from Japan sharing the life of our Christian monks for a couple of weeks was something wholly unusual for us. It is true that in 1975 we had received eleven Tibetan monks and, in 1982, the Dalai Lama himself. But those were short visits of a few hours, which we could consider rather anecdotic.

The invitation we received in 1987 was to be part of the Third East-West Spiritual Exchange. It followed the visit to Europe of more than fifty Buddhist monks and lay people in 1979, and the visit of thirteen Christian monks and two nuns from Catholic monasteries of Europe to Buddhist monasteries in Japan in 1983 (see Benoît Billot, *Voyage dans les Monastères Zen* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1987]). From August 23 to September 16, 1987, twenty-six monks and three nuns from Japanese Buddhist monasteries, belonging to the Zen schools of Rinzai, Sōtō, and Ōbaku, met Catholic monks and nuns in nine monasteries in Italy, Germany, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Spain. They spent a couple of weeks in small groups in one of those monasteries, and at the end they all met together with Catholic monks and nuns in Rome and Camaldoli, Italy.

When Genshō Hōzumi, a Roshi (i.e., a spiritual Master), and young Genkai Sugimoto arrived at the airport of Barcelona, two very different worlds were meeting. They spoke very little English. We two Christian monks who went to meet them were having our first contact with Buddhist monks. On both sides, one could sense some kind of uneasiness while we were trying to show sincere politeness. Probably neither we nor they were really sure about how to act and speak. But as we were approaching our monastery, when for the first time we could see the mountain of Montserrat from the road, the ice was broken. They were very much impressed. The eagerness of Hōzumi Roshi to take pictures of the mountain, their exclamations, their comments among themselves, the notes Sugimoto was taking of my comments, everything showed clearly that we had found a common ground: the location of our monastery on this impressive mountain was speaking deeply to them.

As I reflect again and again upon the experience we lived during those days, this first incident comes back very vividly to my memory because it reveals the level at which communication among us took place. It was difficult to communicate with words. And probably this was not without an advantage: words could mislead us, could become a screen between us. Now we were forced to look at each other, to try to grasp something of what is the life of the other.

And probably this first contact was an expression of their joy at the discovery of something about us that was meaningful to them.

We had prepared ourselves to live this experience by trying to be in tune with what the Church has lived since the Vatican II Council, from *Nostra Aetate* to the interfaith meeting at Assisi on October 27, 1986. With the prospect of a concrete encounter with Buddhist monks, we “discovered” how the Church looks for and finds the *semina verbi* present in these religions, and how we had to offer to them with great simplicity the testimony of Jesus Christ with our own lives. All this had to be lived not only by a few monks who had a special interest in Buddhist religious and monastic experiences, but by *all our monks*. This was important, we thought, both for our community and for our guests: for our community, because we all have to live this dimension of the life of the Church; for our guests, because they had to be able to feel that our openness to them came not only from a few individuals, but from all of us simply because we are Christian monks.

Mons. Piero Rossano, now auxiliary bishop of Rome, some years ago was Secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians (now the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue). In that capacity, he spoke to the Congress of the Benedictine Abbots in 1980 about what the dialogue of Christian monks with the “spirituals” of other religions could be. Mons. Rossano said:

Intermonastic dialogue becomes possible only when the Christian monk fully lives his own identity, and expresses his fundamental decision in a concrete and coherent manner; it is then that he awakens surprise, amazement and expectation in his interlocutor. The fine point of the dialogue, for a monk, is to live in his totality, his own vocation. . . . But in order for the spark of the dialogue to take flight, it is necessary that this identity . . . be accompanied by an attitude of openness, humility and attention to the other. (See *Bulletin de L'AIM*, no. 29 [1980]: 58–67)

Mons. Rossano quoted the words of the Council about the “seeds of contemplative life” that “were sometimes scattered by God in the ancient civilizations before the preaching of the Gospel” (*Ad Gentes* 18). He also quoted the talk of Paul VI to the representatives of the other religions of India: “We must meet . . . as pilgrims on the way to seek God, not in human edifices, but in the hearts of men” (December 3, 1984). Mons. Rossano ended his address with these words of encouragement: “Anything which can be useful for edification, anything which can help in connecting mentally with the roots of the experience of the other or his point of departure in order to mentally travel over his road to Christ’s light, all of that can contribute to a fruitful dialogue in which only the monks are able to engage with their brothers, the non-Christian spirituals. They will thus render a great service to the Church and to the world” (*Bulletin de L'AIM*, no. 29 [1980]).

According to Mons. Rossano, in order to receive these Buddhist monks, to

open our prayer and our community life to them and to offer them our life of being Christian monks, we had to “fully live our own identity and express our fundamental decision in a concrete and coherent manner.” We could, in this way, “awaken surprise, amazement and expectation in our interlocutors.” But we needed yet “an attitude of openness, humility, and attention to the other.” In this way, we could expect “the *spark* of the dialogue to take flight” between us, to enlighten us and to warm our hearts. In fact, our monks who were asked to be in closer contact with the Buddhists found a simple way to ensure doing this: to make sure that they could feel our charity and, in this charity, the presence of Jesus Christ among us, we decided that whenever we would be taking care of them we would always be two or three (“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I will be in the midst of them” [Matt. 18:20]).

Genshō Hōzumi Roshi, fifty-one years old and with thirty years of living as a Buddhist monk, is a very respected Master. He is in charge of the Toko-ji temple in Kameoka, and teaches at the Buddhist Hanazono University, in Kyoto. In 1979, when he was not yet a Roshi, he was among the group who came to Europe. At that time, he spent three weeks in the Cistercian Monastery of Westmalle (Flanders, Belgium). Four years later when he had become a Roshi, he played a very active role in the welcoming of Catholic monks in Japan. So he has become familiar with the Catholic monastic world. He is a person of great intensity in his spiritual life and he is highly interested in this “spiritual exchange” with Christian monks. The intensity and the demand of his spiritual attitude go together with an extreme delicacy and affability. And it was charming to see him, more than once, “explaining” Christian things to the younger Genkai Sugimoto. Sugimoto was thirty-six years old and had nine years of monastic life in the monastery of Shofuku-ji, in Kobe. This was his first contact with the Christian monastic world. Always deferential toward Hōzumi Roshi, he showed a great capacity for admiration and a great interest to know and to understand everything: “*Why?*” he was asking continuously about all aspects of our life. Delicate and with a perennial smile, he surprised us by his capacity for concentration and withdrawal at any moment.

From the very first moment, they showed their eagerness to *learn*. In an address he had brought with him, Hōzumi Roshi said to our Abbot in Spanish: “I consider myself very fortunate to have the opportunity to experiment in living together with you in your famous monastery that has a long tradition and history. Since it is my great desire to learn much about you and exchange our common understanding, ideas and thoughts during my stay in this monastery, I ask you to help me and extend your hand to me toward this end.”

Their wish to do everything like us was always evident. They wanted to understand our life as Christian monks, and to attain this end they tried to follow as much as possible our way of living, with all our observances. From their example, we asked ourselves how we could understand anything of *their* “spiritual life” if not by looking at their own way of living? As I have said, language was a bit of a barrier. But communication among us was not hindered by this

fact. They shared our prayer, our meals, our work and our time of recreation. They knew that we had a time set aside for personal reading and prayer. They noticed that some of our monks spent this time reading while walking in the garden. So Hōzumi Roshi came out to the garden and he himself was seen walking and reading just like us.

We had prepared a small chapel in the garden as the place where they could practice their *zazen*, Zen meditation. It is a quiet place in the midst of the garden. It happens to be a chapel contemporary to the founding of the monastery. Although restored, it is still one of the chapels that we know was in the mountain of Montserrat in the late ninth century when Montserrat first appears in history. The antiquity of that chapel, where they were allowed to practice *zazen* with some Christian monks, was extremely meaningful to them. Their sense of the *tradition* of spiritual people is very strong. These moments in that chapel were a special opportunity for us to become closer to them, to grasp something of their spiritual endeavor. Sometimes we had the help of a translator, a Catalan Claretian missionary to Japan. On those occasions, at the end of the time of *zazen*, Hōzumi Roshi asked us to raise questions, to express our reactions and feelings. He himself, as well as Genkai Sugimoto, also expressed theirs. On both sides, even if with different approaches, it was an experience of communion (to use a Christian term).

Hōzumi Roshi was trying hard to make their experience nearer to us. He compared the tradition that comes to them from the Buddha through the succession of their Masters with the tradition that comes to us from Christ through Saint Benedict and others like Saint Ignatius of Loyola, whom they knew was linked with Montserrat. They were happy to point out that the Japanese Zen tradition and the Benedictine one are both 1500 years old. We were struck by the *intensity* of Hōzumi Roshi. And he stressed to us: "Christ wants you to live with intensity." We felt that what constitutes their fundamental endeavor is to strive to free their own heart (they think that we forget our heart and focus on our mind) of everything that binds it, and to let the "nature of Buddha" manifest itself fully in them. Can this only authentic reality which is in all of us be the mystery of the image of God which we all bear in ourselves?

On the last day of their stay among us, with the help of the translator, all our community had a time of conversation with them. What is important for them is experience; words and reasoning are not. However, in spite of the difference of background it was really a moment of communication. Our translator, knowing the Japanese, was amazed at the fact that they agreed to answer questions about their "spiritual life" to which they usually do not answer. "Here I have learned something," said Genkai Sugimoto. "Humility." We had intended above all to show our love to them. For us Christians, to live the spiritual life is above all to learn to love. According to the Rule of Saint Benedict, love is the crowning of the way of humility and obedience which it proposes to us. One of the questions of Sugimoto concerned that to which we bow in the Church. At our answer, that it was to the Cross, he said: "Oh, to God!" And he told us

that it seemed to him that the reason for the differences between our life and theirs was that their life has its center in themselves, while ours has its center in God.

One aspect of the life in our monastery that impressed them very much was the presence of the numerous pilgrims. "It is a monastery not only for the monks, but also for everybody," said Hōzumi Roshi, speaking about Montserrat at the symposium in Rome. They were impressed to see all these pilgrims praying together with the monks. They attended with the greatest respect all the offices of our liturgy. To attend the Mass, they came dressed with their *keśa*, their more solemn distinctive dress. They were already in the choir for Matins earlier than most of us. In this sharing of our liturgy with us and with the pilgrims, I think that they had a hint of the specific ecclesial dimension of our prayer and thus of our spiritual life. The way of "the labor of obedience which will bring us back to him from whom we had drifted away through the sloth of disobedience" (*The Rule of St. Benedict* [hereafter RB] prologue, 2) will "bring us *all together* to everlasting life" (RB 72, 12). Our spiritual life is a reality only within the reality of the Church. I am sure it is not easy for a Buddhist to understand what we mean by this. But they certainly grasped something of it. Also, the influence of our monastic life on the society around us was something very important for them. And what they sensed of this at Montserrat appealed strongly to them. The Church, the "communion" which is her essence, was thus somehow manifested to them.

We on the other side could see in them the earnestness of their striving in the spiritual life. Their way of salvation is one that each person has to find. Among them the Master does not show the way. He limits himself, explained Hōzumi Roshi, to showing the wrong paths. Our masters do show the way: not only *the* Way which is Christ, but also the steps that experience has taught, and which we find in the Holy Scripture, in the Rule and in the monastic tradition. However, it is good to be reminded that each one of us has to go through this way personally: only then will we really understand it, little by little, as we proceed. We need to live through the fourth step of humility to understand it (RB 7, 35–43). Each one of us has to discover personally what this "perfect love" is at which the monk will quickly arrive after ascending all the steps of humility (RB 7, 67–70).

After the audience with the Pope and the symposium in Rome, the whole group of Buddhist and Catholic monks spent a couple of days at Camaldoli for a sort of *sesshin*, uniting the Zen practice with Catholic liturgy. One evening, toward the end of this *sesshin*, Hōzumi Roshi was directing the *zazen* and was going around with the *keisaku*, a long stick. He stopped in front of me and proposed using it. When I bowed down to receive it, he addressed a few words to me that I could not understand clearly but the meaning of which was deeply clear to me. He wanted to express the bond that now existed between himself and the monks of Montserrat through me. And I understood that this link is an invitation to live our spiritual life with intensity. I myself have been surprised at

the feeling of the strong link that now binds me to him. He reminds me of the words of Jesus: "The Kingdom of Heaven is subject to violence and the violent are taking it by storm" (Matt. 11:12). Each time that I will be tempted to slow down in the intensity of my tension to sanctity, I shall recall the moving and intense endeavor of these Buddhists, and the invitation as well as the example of Hōzumi, "my" Roshi.

This linkage is very concrete. For example, upon returning to Japan, Genkai Sugimoto went to visit a hermit monk from Montserrat who had been in Japan for some fourteen years. It was a way that Sugimoto could keep his relationship with our monastery alive right in the Japanese context. In a letter to our hermit, Genkai Sugimoto wrote: "In my visit to *Montserrat no Seibo Shihō An* [this is the name given to the hermitage], I feel that I have accomplished the conclusion of my journey to visit the Catholic monasteries started in August. It has been really a very interesting journey and it has taught many things to me. I do not have the words to thank you for the warm welcome and the attention of the Catholic monks. My way of showing my thankfulness will be to treat the others with a similar kindness. In this journey, at the same time that I verified my identity as a follower of Buddhism, by comparison with your monasteries I obtained a better understanding of the situation in which Buddhism finds itself in Japan. . . . I hope that sooner or later something new will come about." And he said to our hermit: "If there was in Japan a monastery as big as the one of Montserrat, with its worship, Japanese Buddhism would become something different." Meanwhile, Hōzumi Roshi has expressed to the Catalan Claretians in Japan his wish to "do something in Japan."

Sugimoto also wrote to me in a simple and brotherly letter: "I have got to know a lot of things about Christianity and monastic life during my stay in Montserrat. Now I am interested in Christianity and studying it. This is enjoyable work." And then he added: "I would like to visit Montserrat again someday and we could meet again." Hōzumi Roshi has expressed the same wish to one of our monks in Rome during a recent visit.

As for us, we certainly cannot live as if this encounter had not taken place. I cannot help but ask myself often about how different aspects of our Christian life could be understood by my Zen Buddhist brothers. And I also try on my side to understand the core of their spiritual way. I am ever more convinced that only life can speak to them. They have to be able to "see" my experience, they have to "feel" a *reality* in my life. And this is the reality that "the Lord will by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in his workman cleansed of vices and sins" (RB 7, 70).

Finally, something that deeply struck all of us was their attitude in front of the statue of Our Lady venerated in Montserrat. "Maria," they called her. Their "devotion" and respect when they kissed her hand, as we do, was a sacred moment. I have been told by persons who are familiar with the Buddhist world of Japan, that when they approach Christianity, they pay special attention to the Mother of Jesus. So for us, after all of these experiences, there remains a

seed of communion. A seed which has in itself the yearning to grow. The fact of having discovered ourselves as brothers should grow into discovering together the Father. This is the challenge that we Catholic monks have in front of us. But this is an imposing reality that is far beyond our understanding and our strength. Only by seeking God alone, looking only to Jesus up on the Cross, and entrusting them to Mary, "Mother also of the Buddhists," will the way to follow open itself, day by day, in front of us.

From A Spanish Monastery

GENSHO HOZUMI

Hanazono University

In the past, a Zen monk in Japan was not allowed to enter a Christian monastery. But now in the latter half of our century, entry has been realized. So, eight years ago I had the chance to officially participate in the communal life of the Catholic monks of a Trappist monastery in Belgium. My memory of that experience is still extremely vivid even today, and it still exercises a great influence on my own life. That experience was not just concerned with a Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Rather, apart from the dialogue, it entailed a struggle or an encounter with myself in the matter of living my own life as a human being.

I would be more than honored if my experience, as a Zen monk at the end of the twentieth century, of the Catholic monastic life in the traditional European monasteries could contribute something to the global spiritual culture of the twenty-first century. Today, I am living with this great vision and task in my mind. And I was recently able to renew my participation in the Catholic monastic life—this time for two weeks at a Benedictine monastery near Barcelona, Spain. Let me deliver a brief report on my new experience.

We, my disciple Genkai Sugimoto and I, flew from Narita Airport over to Amsterdam. It took just twelve hours by a nonstop flight. What a convenient time in which we live! After having fully enjoyed the beauty of nature and the rural landscapes in Northern Europe, we then flew to Barcelona, Spain. This was our first visit to Spain. At the airport, two brothers received us and took us with them to the monastery. It was fine weather, and the warm sunlight was impressive. After about a one-hour drive, we began seeing a large rocky mountain ahead of us. The brother driving the car told us to fix our eyes just about halfway up the mountain to find the monastery. There we saw the famous Monastery of Montserrat! We were surprised at the huge mysterious shape of this rocky mountain. The monastery was located at the halfway point, 700 meters above the sea level, of this rocky mountain which is itself 1,200 meters high. At last, we were about to enter this famous old Monastery of Montserrat.

A heavy door was opened. And we were given a warm welcome by the Abbot. I felt at ease in meeting his gentle look. It was the first time for this